

Remarks of President Barack Obama at the New START Treaty Signing Ceremony

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Good morning. I'm honored to be here in the Czech Republic with President Medvedev and our Czech hosts to mark this historic completion of the new START treaty.

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to be back in the beautiful city of Prague. The Czech Republic, of course, is a close friend and ally of the United States. And I have great admiration and affection for the Czech people. Their bonds with the American people are deep and enduring, and Czechs have made great contributions to the United States over many decades – including to my hometown of Chicago.

I want to thank my friend and partner, Dmitry Medvedev. Without his personal efforts and strong leadership, we would not be here today. We have met and spoken by phone many times throughout the negotiation of this Treaty, and as a consequence we have developed a very effective working relationship built upon candor, cooperation, and mutual respect.

One year ago this week, I came to Prague and gave a speech outlining America's comprehensive commitment to stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, and seeking the ultimate goal of a world without them. I said then – and I will repeat now – that this is a long-term goal, one that may not even be reached in my lifetime. But I believed then – as I do now – that the pursuit of that goal will move us further beyond the Cold War, strengthen the global non-proliferation regime, and make the United States, and the world, safer and more secure. One of the steps that I called for last year was the realization of this Treaty, so I am glad to be back in Prague today.

I also came to office committed to "resetting" relations between the United States and Russia, and I know that President Medvedev shared that commitment. As he said at our first meeting in London, our relationship had started to drift, making it difficult to cooperate on issues of common interest to our people. And when the United States and Russia are not able to work together on big issues, it is not good for either of our nations, or for the world.

Together, we have stopped the drift, and proven the benefits of cooperation. Today is an important milestone for nuclear security and non-proliferation, and for U.S.-Russia relations. It fulfills our common objective to negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. It includes significant reductions in the nuclear weapons that we will deploy. It cuts our

delivery vehicles by roughly half. It includes a comprehensive verification regime, which allows us to further build trust. It enables both sides the flexibility to protect our security, as well as America's unwavering commitment to the security of our European allies. And I look forward to working with the United States Senate to achieve ratification of this important Treaty later this year.

Finally, this day demonstrates the determination of the United States and Russia – the two nations that hold over 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons – to pursue responsible global leadership. Together, we are keeping our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which must be the foundation of global non-proliferation.

While the new START treaty is an important step forward, it is just one step on a longer journey. As I said last year in Prague, this treaty will set the stage for further cuts. And going forward, we hope to pursue discussions with Russia on reducing both our strategic and tactical weapons, including non-deployed weapons.

President Medvedev and I have also agreed to expand our discussions on missile defense. This will include regular exchanges of information about our threat assessments, as well as the completion of a joint assessment of emerging ballistic missiles. And as these assessments are completed, I look forward to launching a serious dialogue about Russian-American cooperation on missile defense.

But nuclear weapons are not simply an issue for the United States and Russia – they threaten the common security of all nations. A nuclear weapon in the hands of a terrorist is a danger to people everywhere – from Moscow to New York; from the cities of Europe to South Asia. So next week, 47 nations will come together in Washington to discuss concrete steps that can be taken to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials around the world in four years.

And the spread of nuclear weapons to more states is also an unacceptable risk to global security – raising the specter of arms races from the Middle East to East Asia. Earlier this week, the United States formally changed our policy to make it clear that those non-nuclear weapons states that are in compliance with the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and their non-proliferation obligations will not be threatened by America's nuclear arsenal. This demonstrates, once more, America's commitment to the NPT as a cornerstone of our security strategy. Those nations that follow the rules will find greater security and opportunity. Those nations that refuse to meet their obligations will be isolated, and denied the opportunity that comes with international integration.

That includes accountability for those that break the rules – otherwise the NPT is just words on a page. That is why the United States and Russia are part of a coalition of nations insisting that the Islamic Republic of Iran face consequences, because they have continually failed to meet their obligations. We are working together at the UN Security Council to pass

strong sanctions on Iran. And we will not tolerate actions that flout the NPT, risk an arms race in a vital region, and threaten the credibility of the international community and our collective security.

While these issues are a top priority, they are only one part of the U.S.-Russia relationship. Today, I again expressed my deepest condolences for the terrible loss of Russian life in recent terrorist attacks, and we will remain steadfast partners in combating violent extremism. We also discussed the potential to expand our cooperation on behalf of economic growth, trade and investment, and technological innovation, and I look forward to discussing these issues further when President Medvedev visits the United States later this year. Because there is much we can do on behalf of our security and prosperity if we continue to work together.

When one surveys the many challenges that we face around the world, it is easy to grow complacent, or to abandon the notion that progress can be shared. But I want to repeat what I said last year in Prague: When nations and peoples allow themselves to be defined by their differences, the gulf between them widens. When we fail to pursue peace, then it stays forever beyond our grasp.

This majestic city of Prague is in many ways a monument to human progress. And this ceremony is a testament to the truth that old adversaries can forge new partnerships. I could not help but be struck the other day by the words of Arkady Brish, who helped build the Soviet Union's first atom bomb. At the age of 92, having lived to see the horrors of a World War and the divisions of a Cold War, he said, "We hope humanity will reach the moment when there is no need for nuclear weapons, when there is peace and calm in the world."

It is easy to dismiss those voices. But doing so risks repeating the horrors of the past, while ignoring the history of human progress. The pursuit of peace and calm and cooperation among nations is the work of both leaders and peoples in the 21st century. For we must be as persistent and passionate in our pursuit of progress as any who would stand in our way. Thank you.